



FEDERAL SECURITY AGENCY
PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE

IN REPLYING, ADDRESS THE

USPHS Tbc. Research Lab.
411 East 69th Street
New York 21, N. Y.

Oct. 10, 1952

Dr. Joshua Lederberg
Dept. of Genetics
University of Wisconsin
College of Agriculture
Madison 6, Wisconsin

Dear Josh,

Thanks for sending me the copy of Norm's note, which I presume you don't want returned. In connection with some other correspondence Norm recently told me that he had sent a copy of the note to Francis Ryan. As a result I sent Norm the enclosed letter, which I guess explains my position pretty clearly. I do hope Norm doesn't send the note to MCB at least in its present form since I think it's far too late to withdraw the term prototroph.

As to autotroph, it's my impression that the original definition implied the ability to utilize CO_2 as a sole source of carbon. The Cold Spring Harbor group in volume 11, however, suggests a redefinition which would give the term a more generalized meaning, so that ~~we~~ ^{we} could call an organism autotrophic with respect to carbon, or with respect to any single compound or group of compounds. Since we now know that organisms can be exacting (~~exacting~~ heterotrophic) with respect to one or another trace factor and yet autotrophic with respect to the bulk of their carbon, it seems to me that this redefinition is a useful one. As you see from my attitude toward this word as well as toward prototroph and syntrophism, I have no objection to having the definition of a word refined or otherwise modified as our knowledge increases.

Sincerely,

Bernard D. Davis

BDD/em

